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CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE
AND SOCIAL ORDER



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THE NEED OF THE WORLD

The confusion which exists in the world's life, economic, political and international, is the kind of confusion which is bound to show itself in a world which does not understand what it exists for. It is the confusion which comes from the pursuit of divergent and mutually contradictory objectives. The need of the world today (as always) is to understand and pursue the purpose of God for human life.

I. The Doctrines of Creation and Redemption

(i.) *Creation*

The idea of God's Purpose is an essential part of the Christian doctrine of Creation. God, the Creator, has a purpose in Creation, which ordains the final end towards which human life is meant to move, and towards which, by His Providence, He continually directs it. The physical universe in which we live cannot be hostile to this purpose, for it is created precisely for its fulfilment. The purpose concerns each individual soul, and also the whole history of the world. The value of life consists in man's response to the purpose: and this response is that of person to person. First it is that of each individual to the supreme personal Being of the Creator; but also it is that of a community of persons, in and through their mutual relationships, their social organization, and in and through the material world created by God to be a means by which the response is expressed.

The purpose which demands this response is that the whole creation, including human activity at every level, should be an expression of the glory of the Being of God Himself. Since the natural order is the work of God, man's response to God must include a due regard for the natural, and his leadership in the

natural order must be exercised in obedience to the Creator's law. We are concerned here to show that the demand thus constituted is not upon men's private lives only, but upon their organised social, economic and political activities also ; for disregard for the facts of God's creatorship and man's creaturehood will throw unsupportable strains both upon the person and upon society.

(ii.) *The Incarnation*

To learn the scope and nature of God's Purpose for human life we must consider the implications of the Incarnation. To a large number of professing Christians the Incarnation is concerned only with the salvation of men in their separate and inner lives. But two essential truths which are complementary to this are not so generally realized : first, that since men have bodies as well as souls, and are members of society as well as individuals, their salvation must include the redemption of their whole being in all its relationships : and secondly, that this need is implied by the very form which our Redemption took ; for the taking of human nature into God in the Person of Jesus Christ points to a redemptive purpose which includes not only all men but the whole of human life.

Our belief is that, living a fully human life, and entering fully into the earthly order, Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, thus potentially redeemed the whole range of human relationships. He was a member of a family ; He was a citizen of His country, a member of the Jewish people and of the village community in which He was brought up. He passed through the normal phases of human growth, and had the normal human needs of food, shelter, clothing, education and of all those things which are essential for physical and mental development, and which can only be obtained as a result of the inter-relationship of human beings. By entering into these relationships, Jesus brought them within the sphere of redemption, and showed that they are included in the Kingdom which He came to establish. That the social order of His time was not that of the Kingdom was indicated by the very fact that it rejected Him and sent Him to the Cross. But the Cross is not a denial of the coming of the Kingdom on earth ; it is rather an affirmation of the only way in which it can come. Christianity is, therefore, a Gospel of total redemption, social as well as individual, effected through the Cross.

II. The Kingdom of God

It is profoundly significant that our Lord selected the term "Kingdom of God," or its equivalent "Kingdom of Heaven" as that on which He centred His teaching. The phrase was very familiar to the Jews of His time, and had a long history behind it. Indeed, it was the phrase in which the immemorial hope of Israel found expression, the hope of that Messianic age in the coming of which their chequered history was to find its destined culmination. Inevitably, therefore, our Lord's opening proclamation "The Kingdom of God is at hand" raised to fever heat the expectation of His hearers. Yet, in the main, those expectations had to be discouraged; for the term "Kingdom of God" had come to be interpreted very largely in political terms and to be identified with Israel's liberation from foreign rule. Even the inner ring of our Lord's disciples seemed to have shared this error; and in adopting the term for His own purposes, it was His first task to free it from those unworthy associations which had gathered round it. There is indeed good reason to believe that in the story of the Temptation there is symbolised our Lord's rejection of these false interpretations of the phrase "The Kingdom of God," which had been placed upon it by the three main Jewish parties of the time; the Sadducees, the party of wealth and privilege, who looked for nothing beyond an age of material plenty; the Pharisees, who looked for a sign from heaven, a sudden Divine intervention for the realization of their political dreams, and the Zealots, the left-wing extremist party, who believed in force and violence as the means by which Israel's political destiny was to be accomplished.

Yet in spite of the many false associations which had gathered round it, and which He deliberately discarded, our Lord still made the Kingdom of God the subject of His opening proclamation and the pivot of His teaching. In parable after parable, drawn from everyday life, He set forth the nature of the Kingdom, as He interpreted it, and as He encouraged His followers to interpret it. And central in the prayer which He taught His disciples to use, and which down the ages they have continuously used, He set the petition "Thy Kingdom Come," a petition which should sum up, and was intended to sum up, the Christian hope in every age.

What meaning then are we to read in the phrase, as we try to be true to the mind of our Lord? If He rejected the narrow

nationalistic ambitions with which the term had come to be identified, what positive interpretation did He himself place upon it? As with the prophets before Him, so with Him it summed up the goal and culmination of His people's history. For Him, as for them, it had its social, and indeed, its national implications, though for Him, in greater measure than for them, its implications were not only of national but of universal validity. He set God's Kingdom alongside God's righteousness as correlative terms. Thus the Kingdom is the realm within which that righteousness is the law of life. And as such it knows no boundaries of time or place, of people or nation.

In a word, the Kingdom of God is nothing else than human life and human society brought wholly under the Divine sovereignty and subjected to the Divine will. It is the city foursquare, with its gates open to North and South, to East and West, illuminated by the light of God's Presence, and into which the nations of the earth bring their glory and honour, the Divine Commonwealth with the vision of which the whole Biblical record closes.

So then the Kingdom of God as proclaimed by our Lord was no mere apocalyptic dream. It was to find concrete and visible embodiment in earthly terms. On the other hand, it is no man-built structure, no achievement of human enterprise and ingenuity. It comes down out of Heaven from God. It is from above, not from below. It is not discovered, but revealed. It is the pattern given of God in the mount, and only they who will ascend into the mount can discern it. Yet it is a pattern which is not given just for contemplation. It is 'of heaven' in order that it may be brought to earth. It is the standard, given and revealed of God, which is to find expression in every field of human life, social, industrial and political. "My Kingdom," said our Lord, "is not of this world." Yet it has to be established *in* this world: and while the Kingdom of God can never find complete embodiment in terms of earth and of sinful humanity, yet there in it is found the master light of all man's seeing and doing, the goal and culmination of human history.

And of the Kingdom as so conceived, and so striven for, the Church is the God-given instrument. The Kingdom is not, indeed, to be identified with the Church. It embodies a larger hope and a wider vision than that for which the visible Church in itself stands. Yet apart from the Church that hope and that vision cannot find fulfilment. The Church is the community

of those called out from society as a whole, who are pledged to give expression in their corporate and individual lives to the standard of the Kingdom. And as such the Church is the leaven through which the whole lump of human society is to be leavened by the spirit of Christ, and brought under the rule of God. And the Church will then have completed its mission, when the kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdom of God and of Christ, and God is all in all.

III. The Redemption of the World

(i). *Social and Personal Redemption*

The spiritual problems of social and individual life are fundamentally the same. For both of these there is the will of God, the realization of which is hindered by man's sin. In both there is the same need of redemption. There is no redemption save in Christ and His Cross ; there is no human need which is outside the scope of that redemption. That society has gone astray from God's purpose is plain enough. That it can be redeemed in Christ is an essential part of the Christian Gospel.

Indeed social redemption and personal redemption cannot be kept apart. For the personality of the individual cannot be fully developed except in society. The life of the individual and that of the society in which he lives are so interwoven that the complete redemption of either involves the redemption of both. There is an element of paradox here. Man's life cannot be wholly redeemed so long as the social order to which he belongs is inimical to the practice of the Christian faith. Yet, the redemption of society is only possible if it is being continuously transformed by the impact upon it of a community of redeemed persons in its midst.

(ii). *The Way of Redemption*

Nor is the way of redemption, which the Church has always preached, of such a nature as to be inapplicable to social life. The Cross, repentance, and a new life in the power of the Spirit, all that we hold to be necessary for the salvation of the individual soul, are equally necessary for the salvation of society. Until they are given a social as well as an individual application, they do not disclose their full meaning.

First, then, *the Cross*. We, who preach Christ's Gospel, must follow His way. Followers of the Crucified, we must ourselves take up our Cross. There is no other way of redemption. Christianity does not indeed glorify suffering for its own sake. But it does warn us that, if we are faithful in our endeavour to live according to the Divine Will, we shall have to take risks and face dangers. We shall have to be prepared to suffer, and through suffering shall find redemption. So Christ faced danger, accepted the consequences of what He said and did, and in the Cross found His triumph. It is the Cross which has made His Gospel live ; for the Cross stands for the fundamental truth of the necessity of Atonement for sin ; without which there can be no redemption.

It is clear enough that, if the Church is going to be faithful in preaching His Gospel in its social implication it will have to take risks, and face danger, and be prepared to suffer. But unless those who stand for it are prepared to suffer for it, no cause can prosper, not even God's. For this is the way of the Cross. Nor will the risks and the danger and the suffering be confined to the Church. Society must be prepared for them too.

Secondly, *Repentance*. Jesus preached the Kingdom and called men to repent and receive the Gospel. Social redemption, won in the same way as personal redemption, must be appropriated in the same way, that is, by repentance and faith. We must rouse men to a belief in the possibility of social redemption, and call them to a real collective repentance for corporate sin, a real change of heart and mind in society as a whole.

Thirdly, the *New Life*. Social redemption, like personal redemption, will mean resurrection into a new life. Society, too, will be risen with Christ. There will be a new social, political and economic order, charged with heavenly significance and expressing the Will of God.

IV. The Sacramental View of Life

(i). *All Life is Sacramental*

Our belief that God made the world compels us to see it as God's world, a world not only of time and space, but also ordained for an eternal purpose. We are to find the real values of all earthly things, and the final objective of all our dealings with them and with one another, in the eternal. To cut life into two halves of which only one has reference to the eternal,

whilst the other can rightly be regarded as having only temporal aims and values, is to deny religion at its very source. The Incarnation was itself the expression of the sacramental nature of the world. The true Christian view of the whole of life is sacramental. It teaches us to find in material things the means for that spiritual power which is eternal. It recognizes that the spiritual is effective in this world only when it finds some material embodiment. It is this sacramental view which lies behind our acceptance of the Incarnation as the natural mode of God's revelation of Himself. It is this view which lies behind the Christian Eucharist. But it has a much wider scope even than this. It is true in these, because it is true universally. The true Christian view of the whole of life is sacramental.

(ii). *The Social Significance of Baptism*

The Sacraments of the Church express the life of the Church. In Holy Baptism two things stand out : the recognition of the unique worth of each child of God, as each individual is baptized into Christ, and the reception of the individual into the fellowship of the faithful, in which alone this individuality can fully develop. Nothing could make plainer the interdependence of the personal and the social, and the inclusion of both within the sphere of religion.

(iii). *The Social Significance of the Eucharist*

First, the Eucharist symbolizes the whole economic process as God means it to be. As the bread and wine in the Eucharist are offered to God to be sanctified, so, according to the divine intention, must the economic process be offered, that it too may be a means of grace to God's people. Secondly, the Eucharist is a feast of fellowship, witnessing to the unity of the Church, and so to the potential unity in Christ of the whole of man's earthly life. Until we see the Eucharist as a bringing of the whole process of life into the Divine presence, and the whole organization of society as an instrument of worship, neither will the Eucharist have its true power among us, nor will the social order be redeemed from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

It is for the Church, the spirit-bearing Body, to be in virtue of the presence in it of Christ, living and creative, the focus and centre of the spiritual regeneration of society, embodying in its own corporate life the Christian social ideal. But the work

of the Spirit is not confined to the Church. Far beyond the limits of the Christian Fellowship, the Spirit works in men's hearts and brings them to see and follow some part of the truth. It is largely to this pervasive work of the Spirit that we must look for the general change of social outlook which leads to corporate repentance. But the spear-head of the movement must be the Christian Church. The Christian Church must both embody and commend to others the social outlook and principles which she derives from her Master, and which appertain to the divine purpose for the whole of life.

We have thus endeavoured to summarize our justification for asserting our belief that the Christian Church should concern itself, not only with personal, but with social salvation.

V. Certain Principles of Christian Sociology

Tentatively, and being well aware that the work of thinking out afresh the meaning of Christian doctrine in relation to present problems is barely begun, we desire to outline certain basic principles which it is the Church's duty to urge upon the community.

(i). The Sanctity of Personality

We have been concerned to show that the Church must necessarily be concerned with social order; but it is very necessary today to insist that there can be no valid social order which disregards the sanctity of human personality. God has made all men in His own image, immortal souls of infinite value and potentiality. This truth is manifested by the Incarnation, and is implicit in all Christ's teaching. Any corporate action, any legislation, or any failure to legislate, therefore, which is destructive of personality, or hinders its proper growth, is wrong and essentially unchristian.

The reaction against the individualism of the Industrial Revolution has now produced so great an emphasis upon the collective life of society that there is a grave danger that the essential dignity and responsibility of the person may be ignored. A collectivist theory may assume that it is morally justified, merely because it is collectivist. But if a more equal distribution of wealth, a more equal administration of our resources for providing education and health, more wide-spread opportunities

for the enjoyment of leisure, are achieved only upon the assumption that the recipients of these benefits are the instruments of the collective society and are to find in it the object of their ultimate obedience and loyalty, then the meaning of the whole socialising process collapses.

For the question arises, what is the meaning, and what the purpose of this social collective? It can provide no philosophical account of itself which supplies the lives of men with any ultimate value. However great may be the insistence which is laid upon the need for social consciousness, it must never be forgotten that in a society in which the person's ultimate meaning is not found in his relation to God, the human being is merely the instrument of some finite, earthly end. The service of such a collective, as if it were the final purpose of life, is a form of idolatry.

(ii). *Person and Community*

The Christian doctrine of personality, however, never assumes that the person is to be regarded as essentially isolated and self-complete. The person dwells, by his own nature, in a community of persons; for man is made in the image of God, Who is Blessed Trinity. It is thus within the natural community, of which the family is the basic unit, that the person finds his self realisation. And it is of the nature of community to exist in a series of concentric, widening circles: family, village or town, region, nation, world. But the development of the larger circles is not intended to suppress or abolish the smaller ones, but to fortify and sustain them, because only through the health of the smaller circles can the health of the larger be secured. Within this community-life the spontaneous and natural activities of man, social, cultural, economic and political, are intended to proceed.

When those activities are addressed to false purposes, the life of the community falls into confusion, and there may thus appear a tendency to seek the security of society by substituting for the cohesive effects of the neglected right purposes the coercive power of the political State, so that the State becomes a substitute for community, and all human activities become absorbed into the political function. This is the tendency of our time. But however urgent may seem the reasons for it, its basis is a fallacy. The State is not to be identified with the community. It is a servant of community. In the words of Dr. Temple,

“ The State is a necessary organ of the national community, maintaining through law, as promulgated by a government endowed to this end with coercive power, the universal external conditions of social order.”

The requirement that the relation of person to person shall be primarily exercised through the political function is a false requirement. And the theoretical control of the State by a mass democracy cannot destroy that falsity. It is the supreme task of Christian sociology to encourage a mode of cohesion amongst men in which they shall find their self-expression and their human relations directly and immediately in the natural associations of community. The Holy Communion of the Church pre-figures the community redeemed ; and it is only through a redeemed community that political power can be directed to right purposes. Disordered man cannot save himself by his politics, unless he seeks first a vision of order beyond politics.

(iii). *Community and Peace*

The redemption of community must involve the return of men to those purposes upon the natural level which are in harmony with the final supernatural purpose of their life ; and this principle applies to community throughout all its concentric circles, from the family in a home to the whole brotherhood of mankind. The breakdown of marriage and the family, and the breakdown of the comity of nations, have the same evil root in the divorce of man's natural life from its supernatural end, and the consequent loss of true purposes upon the natural level. The peace of the home, the peace of the social order, and the peace of the world, alike depend upon man's acceptance of the peace of God which is given to him only when he seeks to do the Will of God upon every level of his being. And the Will of God upon the natural level is that human action upon that level shall seek the natural ends which God has ordained for it.

It is hopeless to expect marriage to bring blessedness, while men and women seek in it, not the purposes for which it was ordained, but merely such satisfactions as are too often suggested on the films. It is equally unrealistic to expect social peace while the economic structure places a greater value upon financial aggrandisement than upon the satisfaction of human need. It is useless to try to establish international peace by high-flown, idealistic political professions, while nations build their life upon economics which menace the economics of other nations,

in a struggle to achieve a "favourable balance of trade" by means of a "trade war."

The distortions of purpose which lead to human chaos in every sphere, and then to humanistic attempts to control the chaos by force of centralised political power, set man a task which he can never perform by his own merely human resources. They arise from a denial of the over-lordship of God ; but they produce such a fundamental confusion of means and ends as can be escaped only by a return to the Christian doctrine of the Final End of creation, in the light of which alone the true hierarchy of purposes can be re-established. By this is meant that it is only when we believe that all our human life is intended for the Glory of God that we can put our human concerns in the order of their true importance. And the re-establishment of that order is the greatest need of man's social, political and economic life today.

Conclusion

The Call to Holiness

It follows from all that has been said that the one thing supremely needful for the coming of the Kingdom is a heightened spiritual quality both in the individual Christian, and in the Church as a whole. If the goal of human life is the vision of God, then no passion for social reform, and no concern with the better ordering of human relationships on the natural level must be allowed to detract from response to the Divine call to holiness. Indeed, it is the authentic manifestation of the super-earthly quality of holiness which more than anything else can contribute to the establishment of the different levels and departments of human life in their true order of importance. It is still the Saints who are the salt of the earth, imparting its pungent savour to the whole lump of human society, delivering it from corruption and penetrating it with its own cleansing, healing and saving power. Good conditions of work, wages and hours, good houses and open spaces may be sufficient for a modern Garden City, but are not enough for the City of God. For man is made for more than bread, and it is as he and the whole of human life is raised from the natural to the supernatural level that the natural is ordered to its true end, and man's God-given Destiny is attained.

Appendix

The Social Traditions of the Church

There exists still the erroneous belief that the concern of the Church in the social order is of recent date only ; that it is, in fact, something added to traditional Christianity. In view of this, it is well for Church people to remember how integral a part of Church doctrine was the conception of Christian social behaviour in the Early and Middle Ages. There is much to be learnt from the developed social traditions of the Church as they took shape in the age when the Christian Faith was in theory accepted as the basis of the social order.

This basis was the over-arching economic principle that all activities by which men earn their daily bread exist to serve man's *whole* personality, as man himself exists to serve and worship God. All things must subserve man's eternal destiny since he is a spiritual, immortal, being whose end is the Vision of God. Material things are good since they are created by God ; but must take only their due place in the hierarchy of values which constitute the wholeness of life.

Goods exist not only to be enjoyed in right proportion, but are also means whereby man grows in virtue, and must be so controlled.

The tendency of money, especially, is to escape such control becoming an end in itself, and the master, not the servant, of all economic activity. The Church, therefore, sought to hold in check all financial and commercial operations.

While lifting the Patristic prohibition on Christians engaging in finance, there remained a profound suspicion regarding the evil possibilities in the re-appearance of a money economy ; in particular, its potential power over man's entire life.

The efforts of the Church were directed, not to the setting up of a specific system, but to the keeping of money in its due place in the great synthesis of life centred round the Will and Purpose of God. This Purpose was deemed to operate, in the natural order, in the form of Justice. To achieve this, the principle of Commutative Justice was laid down as being the form of Justice proper to economic activity. It involves :—

(a) the *Just Price*. This implied that a man's work should normally be recompensed by an income which gives him a reasonable livelihood. Every member of society has a right to live, and to live a decent human life : to pay a price for his

labour (or for the commodity produced by it) which will not allow of this, is unjust, and therefore sinful. Further, the doctrine that there is a Just Price of each commodity, which buyer and seller alike must seek, implies that there is an economic reality, a complex of objective fact, and that action in this economic field must be just, *i.e.*, in accordance with these real relationships of things and persons as they ought to be. On both these points the reference to economic reality as well as to the rule of right—the difference between mediaeval and modern economic thought is marked. (b) *The Prohibition of Usury*. This prohibition was no mere mistake about the barrenness of money. It corresponded with its historic situation, and was modified according to historical developments, and throughout what is implied was that money power is a dangerous thing, and must not be permitted to dominate human interests. “The assumption was that the danger of economic interests increased in direct proportion to the prominence of the pecuniary motives associated with them” (Tawney). For they take men’s minds away from the human and the real.

(c) *Liberality*, *i.e.*, the right spending of money otherwise than Almsgiving. This includes cheerful paying of taxes for public necessities, beautifying of cities, making splendid the life of men.

